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ABSTRACT

This paper sets a context for career development services, including their importance and where they are typically delivered. Career development services are being delivered in many sectors: career education is delivered in schools and post-secondary institutions; career counseling is available from community agencies and private practitioners; and employment services are typically available from government-funded agencies and outplacement organizations. A definition of career development is presented so that there is a common vocabulary to consider and respond to. Career development is described as a developmental learning process that evolves throughout a person's life, and includes at least three major areas: self-awareness/preparation, opportunity awareness, and decision and transition learning. The conclusion includes a commentary on the focus of public policy, which is a central theme of the 1999 International Symposium. (JDM)

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Career Development and Public Policy:

A Framework Document

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2. A FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT

This paper is intended to:

- set a context for career development services — their importance and where they are typically delivered;
- present a definition of career development so there is a common vocabulary to consider and respond to (there is no assumption that this is "the" definition); and
- provide an orientation to the public policy focus which will be central at the Symposium in May.

Career Development Services — Why and Where

Massive changes in the labour market — the structure of opportunity, globalization and the very nature of employment — are leaving our working lives in a state of permanent flux. Staying with a single employer is now the exception; several careers in different fields are rapidly becoming the new norm. Moving back and forth between education and work is expected, and periods of unemployment are commonplace. These shifts — which have occurred within the last decade — represent enormous changes in the relationships between individuals and organizations, and in the nature of paid work. These changes alter significantly the role career development services needs to play for the average citizen.

In the past, people usually needed assistance with their career only at major decision points, such as leaving school, graduating from post-secondary institutions or changing jobs. Now, career change is constant, and the demands for services have changed. Secondary school students increasingly need (and parents expect) services which motivate them to complete school and make sound decisions regarding post-secondary training and education. Openness to lifelong learning, increased personal responsibility, flexibility and adaptability, although important at every stage of a career, are now essential attributes for graduates and entry-level workers. Career education, once considered optional, now is seen as belonging squarely in the mainstream of academic curriculum.

At the same time, increasing numbers of workers need periodic assistance over their working lives in order to make informed decisions about their place in the labour market, and to acquire the employability skills needed to become/remain successful. As a result, there is unprecedented demand for career development services to assist in managing change effectively and economically.

Career development services are being delivered in many sectors. Typically:

- **Career education** is delivered in schools and post-secondary institutions. Students are helped to understand what motivates them, what they value and how they want to contribute to society. They acquire knowledge about the labour market; skills to make sound choices about education, training and working options; and career planning tools needed to begin to pursue a career direction.

- **Career counselling** is available from community agencies and private practitioners. It helps individuals clarify their aims and aspirations, make informed decisions, manage career transitions, cope with unplanned career changes (including sudden unemployment) and be self-directed in managing their employability.

- **Employment services** are typically available from government-funded agencies and outplacement organizations. These services help individuals to understand and access job opportunities, make sound decisions about "upskilling" and retraining, and learn skills they need in looking for and maintaining jobs.

Many sectors are active in addressing the career development needs of citizens. It is crucial to recognize also that citizens do not all have an equal advantage, and opportunities are not evenly distributed. Career development services need to provide remedial and crisis assistance to overcome personal, educational and societal barriers. They have an important role to play in helping people faced with disadvantages to access the labour market and succeed in it. While some may have career/working lives that may proceed smoothly without unwanted disruption, most do not. Career development is a major aspect of human development. A common frame of reference will help to normalize career development and position it in the mainstream of services — it really is "everybody's business."

Career Development Services — A Definition

What Do We Mean by "Career Development?"

The understanding of career development is fraught with misconceptions, among them:

- Expert advice is available from professionals who can accurately predict where jobs will be in the future and can help individuals make perfect choices.

- A battery of tests will lead to the selection of a perfect occupation.

- Career development is remedial help needed only by people who have problems, are underemployed or unemployed.

These misconceptions highlight the importance of understanding career development and establishing a common language and terminology.

Career development is, as the word suggests, a "developmental" learning process that evolves throughout our lives. The subject matter of career development learning includes at least three major areas.

- **Self-awareness/preparation** helps us clarify personal values, strengths, potential and aspirations. The skills acquired in this phase are used throughout our lives. As youth, we learn skills to study, organize, plan, manage time and set goals. In adulthood, we apply them in our relationships with others and to balance work and other life roles.

- **Opportunity awareness** relates to the world of work (paid and unpaid) where we must make our choices. Youth need to understand issues and trends that affect education/training and employment opportunities, to learn respect for work of all kinds and to learn about the full range of opportunities available to them and how to access them. Throughout our working lives, we use these skills to locate, evaluate and interpret career information, to analyze and recognize opportunities, and to explore (and succeed in) education and work.

- In **decision and transition learning**, youth build their capacity to transfer skills taught in school subjects to further learning and employment. They use action plans to accomplish learning goals, and they develop skills to cope with the unexpected. As adults, we continue to need skills in career planning and decision making, seeking and maintaining jobs, making career transitions, managing unexpected change, and participating in lifelong learning (Watts, 1994).

Career development is the process of managing learning and work over the lifespan. In managing learning and work well, individuals are able to make productive choices and move toward building their desired futures.

At points of service delivery, career development traditionally addresses the welfare of individuals and is fully compatible with the above definition. However, the massive changes in labour markets referred to earlier and the constant fluctuations of work needs in organizations have enormous impact on the viability of communities, whether urban, rural or remote.

While this has always been so in degrees, there is increasing thought being given to the interrelationships between career development and community development.

In career development, efforts focus on meeting the changing social and economic needs of individuals and groups. It is argued that investing in

these services is also a public and private good, both in social and economic terms.

In community development, the effort is on people working together to meet the changing social and economic needs of the community. Once again, investing in these services is a public and private good, both in social and economic terms.

Career development assists in developing human potential and a strong human resource base; community development assists in ensuring that optimum use is made of its human resources. Both are crucially needed to sustain productive and humane communities. Some countries may be relatively advanced in bridging individual and community development; others are only beginning. It does appear, however, to be a trend not only of considerable importance and potential but also one with strong policy implications.

Career Development and Public Policy: Some Background Notes

Most career development services are funded by governments, whether directly or indirectly. In providing support, the main objectives of governments tend to be:

- Economic efficiency in the allocation and use of human resources so the labour market operates productively and competitively. This also links the educational system and the labour market so government investment in education yields economic benefits.

- Social equity in access to educational and work opportunities. This includes innovative strategies to support equal access to opportunities for all citizens.

Note that different political philosophies attach more or less relative weight to the importance of economic efficiency and social equity.

In this sense, career development can be viewed, from a policy perspective, as a kind of "broker" between individual and societal needs. It is a means of encouraging individuals to participate in determining their role within and their contribution to society. This emphasis on the "active individual" provides a third rationale for policy interest in career development — which helps to explain why countries with market economies have tended to pay more attention to this field than countries with planned economies.

A fourth rationale may be the community/career development connection with an emphasis on "active individuals" developing community choices, capacity and sustainability. Career development professionals tend to argue

that their primary client must be the individual, rather than employers, government or community. It has been argued that career development services can only be accountable for direct results for individuals, and not for results for indirect beneficiaries. Community development accountability structures may encourage a broadening of this view and serve to integrate economic and social outcomes.

The generally held view is that career development is not so much a direct instrument of public policy, but more a "lubricant" of such policies. Accordingly, career services would be responsible for ensuring that individual choices are well informed in terms of the opportunity structure, but not responsible for developing the opportunity structure itself. The assumption is that if individuals are helped to make choices which are in their own best interests, this will ultimately serve the public interest too. It is, in principle, a classic case of Adam Smith's famous dictum: individuals encouraged to pursue their own interests are led by an "invisible hand" to promote an end which is not part of their intention — the public interest — and to do so more effectively than if they had intended to promote it.

An alternate view is that when people within communities are helped to organize in the public interest, they engage in useful endeavours resulting in outcomes which are both in their own and the community interest. According to this alternate view, career development becomes a more direct instrument of public policy.

As noted earlier, most career services are funded to some extent by governments. The funding may be direct to agencies or programs, or indirect, such as funding to educational institutions that choose to give some priority to the provision of career services. Whether direct or indirect, the government may seek to influence the nature of services provided. Such influence can be exerted in a variety of ways, including developing formal policy guidelines, mandating policies, building collaborative initiatives and creating principled visions that command imagination and effort.

The balance between these functions may vary in relation to different sectors:

- **Education.** The role may be confined to influence through guidelines and some level of regulation.

- **Employers.** Tends to be voluntary and the role may be limited to influence and collaborative initiatives.

- **Direct purchase of services.** Requires decision on the levels of funding and on what services will be funded or left to the free market. Most likely role will include relatively strong mandated policies.

- **Community development.** Most likely role to be guidelines, principled visions and collaborative initiatives.

There may be other functions evident in other countries that present different policy implications. The symposium provides a rich opportunity to examine the functions and their underlying political philosophies. Earlier, it was suggested that effective career development assists individuals to make productive choices and to move toward building their desired futures. It is hoped that the symposium will guide the career development profession toward these same outcomes — to make productive choices for the field and to build policies to support desired national and international futures.

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